

The Gathering Church
Sonia's message 5/24/26
Chasing Smoke, Finding Water - Week 6

Jesus Lived Thirsty
Jesus Understands Longing
Come to Jesus

Living Thirsty

A sermon inspired by themes from Kent Denlinger's book "Living Thirsty"

Primary Text: Hebrews 2:17

Hebrews 2:17 says, *"For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people."*

That one verse opens a door into the mystery and the majesty of Jesus Christ. He did not merely appear human. He did not simply visit our suffering from a distance. He entered it. He stepped into our weakness, our limitations, our grief, our weariness, our tears, and our temptation. He was made like us in every way, yet without sin. And because he came all the way into our condition, he is not only our Savior—he is also our merciful and faithful high priest.

So here is the questions that will guide us today: Did Jesus live thirsty on this earth? Did he feel the ache of living in a world that was never meant to be our final home? Did he know what it was to carry a holy longing in a broken world?

I believe the answer is yes. **Jesus lived thirsty.** He lived with the deep ache of righteousness in an unrighteous world, with the longing of love in a world of resistance, with the hunger for home while walking as a stranger and pilgrim among us. And if that is true, then our own thirst does not have to be a sign that something is wrong with our faith. Sometimes our thirst is the very place where faith becomes real.

The language of thirst is not new to Scripture.

Psalm 42:1–2 says, *"As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God."*

That is not the cry of a shallow believer. That is the cry of a soul that knows nothing in this world can replace the presence of God. **Holy thirst is not weakness; it is often the evidence that our hearts still know where true life is found.**

Hebrews 4:15 tells us that *"we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who was tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin."*

That means Jesus did not only understand pain theoretically, He experienced the pull of temptation. He knew what it was to feel the pressure to escape discomfort, to avoid suffering, to seize control, to take a shortcut, to satisfy a legitimate need in an illegitimate way. In the wilderness Satan tempted him to turn stones into bread, to grasp glory without the cross, to take the kingdoms without the suffering. (Matthew 4:1-11) In other words, **Jesus was tempted to remove the ache without surrendering to the Father.** But where we so often reach for relief before obedience, Jesus remained faithful.

That is where this message meets us. We know something about thirst, but we are often quick to numb it. We take shortcuts. We bite at the apple that promises life but leaves us emptier than before. We try to make this world feel like home through comfort, control, distraction, applause, consumption, or secret sin. We tell ourselves that if the ache would just go away, then we could finally have peace. But **Jesus never dulled the ache through disobedience.** He never sinned to soften the edge of living in a fallen world. And because he never gave in, it is possible that **he felt the full force of longing more deeply than we do.** His incarnation did not make obedience easier. In many ways it made his faithfulness more remarkable, because **he remained fully present to the sorrow of this world** while perfectly surrendered to the will of his Father.

Jesus did what we too often fail to do: he stayed thirsty without turning away from God.

He lived here thirsty, yet he never lost sight of his God-given mission. Every step of his earthly life put on display the heart of God. In Jesus we see that the heart of God is not cold, detached, or untouched. The heart of God is merciful. The heart of God is faithful. The heart of God moves toward sufferers. The heart of God does not despise weakness but enters it in order to redeem it. Jesus reveals a God who does not shame our thirst but meets us in it, teaches us through it, and ultimately satisfies it in himself.

So when we say that Jesus lived thirsty, we mean that he felt the ache, the disappointments, and the longing for more in a way that was profoundly human. He knew what it was to be misunderstood. He knew what it was to love people who resisted him. He knew what it was to be surrounded by need **and yet still have to wait on the Father's timing.** He knew what it was to pour himself out and still be rejected. Yet every time the ache arose, Jesus turned again to the Father. He withdrew to pray. He entrusted himself to the One who sent him. He lived from communion, not from self-soothing. That is one of the clearest marks of spiritual maturity: **not that we never feel thirst, but that we know where to take it.**

We see this thirst vividly in Luke 19. Near the end of his earthly ministry, Jesus approached Jerusalem. He sent two disciples ahead to secure a colt, and then he rode toward the holy city as the people praised God with words drawn from Psalm 118: *"Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord."*

The moment was full of significance. The King had come. The long-awaited Messiah was entering the city of God. Yet even in that scene of celebration, there was also sorrow. The Pharisees objected to the praise. They did not discern who stood before them. And Jesus said that if the disciples kept silent, the stones themselves would cry out. Then, **as he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it.** (Luke 19:41)

Why did he weep? Because Jerusalem, the very center of religious life, did not recognize **the hour of its visitation.** The city that longed for peace did not recognize the Prince of Peace. **The people that for centuries had awaited salvation, did not recognize the Savior.** Christ' tears reveal the ache in his heart. He thirsted for people to see him as he truly is. He longed for the city of God to welcome its King. He grieved what sin and blindness had done to the human heart.

We see it again in John 11 at the tomb of Lazarus. Jesus arrives after Lazarus has died, and Mary comes to him weeping: *"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."* (vs 32)

Denlinger notes that those words hold both faith and disappointment. She believes in him, yet her heart is broken. **And when Jesus sees her weeping, and sees those around her weeping, the Bible says he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled.** Then, standing before the tomb, Jesus was again deeply moved. John wants us to see this clearly. **The Son of God did not stand at death's doorstep untouched.** He did not rush past grief because resurrection was only moments away. **He allowed himself to feel the full weight of what sin had done to the world.** He saw the sorrow of his friends. He saw the confusion of the disciples. He saw the tyranny of death. **And he groaned within himself.**

What is so striking is that Jesus knew what he was about to do. He was about to call Lazarus from the grave. He was about to display the glory of God in unmistakable power. Yet **his foreknowledge did not cancel his compassion. His certainty did not silence his sorrow.** He did not use truth to bypass pain. He did not deny the ache simply because he knew resurrection was coming. **That is an important word for us in the church. Sometimes, in our desire to sound spiritual, we rush one another past grief. We quote promises without sitting in sorrow. We speak of victory without acknowledging the wound.** But Jesus shows us a better way. In a broken world, sin is still having a field day. Death still wounds. Relationships still fracture. Bodies still fail. Hearts still break. Faith does not require us to pretend otherwise. **Real faith brings its ache into the presence of God and refuses to let pain have the final word.**

So how do we walk through pain and still hold on to the truth? We do it the way Jesus did. We refuse both denial and despair. **We do not pretend that the world is whole when it is not,** and we do not surrender to hopelessness when Christ has conquered death. **We name what is broken. We grieve honestly.** We lament what sin has damaged. There is a book of Lamentations that acknowledges pain and teaches us how to cry out our pain to God. What we do in those seasons, is to **keep turning to the Father.** We keep praying. We keep trusting. We keep obeying.

To live thirsty as a disciple of Jesus means we stop demanding that every ache be removed *immediately*. **Instead, we let our longing become a language of dependence. We let thirst drive us to God rather than away from him.**

I have been struggling with the loss of my mother in January. And to be honest, I have been attempting to numb myself by staying busy. To the extent that I did not even notice the telltale signs of emotional exhaustion. Last Friday, my husband and I traveled up to Atlanta to attend a family baby christening ceremony. Javan drove while I sat with my computer in my lap trying to keep up with schoolwork. Now, that might seem like I was still attempting to fill my moments by being busy, but the remarkable result is that in that long drive to and from Atlanta, working, talking, reading, dozing, a weekend spent talking with family, attendance at church watching a baby being dedicated to the Lord, was what my spirit had needed. All of it revived my soul. That quiet weekend lasting 4 days allowed me to relax, think about my grief, and to quietly have healing God-thoughts as I sorted the long game of salvation in my heart.

The second story Denlinger references is the cross, where the theme becomes unmistakable. Among the seven sayings of Jesus from the cross is this simple statement: "I thirst." Of course, those words express a real physical thirst. The crucified body of Jesus was suffering in agony. He had been beaten, scourged, and nailed to the cross. But those words also open a window into something deeper. Here is the Son of God entering the extremity of human weakness. Here is the One who once said, *"If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink,"* (John 7:37) now hanging in our place and crying out in

thirst. Some believe the sour wine offered to him could have functioned as a kind of numbing relief, which he rejected after tasting, yet the larger picture remains this: **Jesus embraced the full cost of his mission. He did not come down from the cross. He did not abandon the assignment.** He entered our thirst all the way down. And as many Christians have reflected, including Mother Teresa, the cry “I thirst” also points to the deep longing of Christ for souls, for love, for the restoration of his people. He thirsts not only physically in that moment, but redemptively—bearing the ache of a world far from God and opening the way home for all who believe.

And that brings us to us. Our souls are thirsty—for peace with God, for peace with one another, for healing, for wholeness, for home. We are thirsty to be fully known and fully loved. We are thirsty for a righteousness this world cannot manufacture. We are thirsty because we were made for more than this passing age can give. The good news of the gospel is not that Jesus stands far away from that thirst. The good news is that he has lived it. He has carried it. He has sanctified it. And now he meets us in it.

And Jesus does not leave thirsty people without an invitation. In John 7:37–38, he stood and cried out, “*Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.*” The answer to spiritual thirst is not denial, distraction, or self-sufficiency. **The answer is Christ himself.** He does not merely sympathize with our thirst; he satisfies it with his living presence.

So if you came in today tired, aching, grieving, restless, disappointed, or spiritually dry, hear this clearly: **your thirst does not disqualify you. Bring it to Jesus.** Do not hide it behind religion. Do not numb it with substitutes. Do not interpret it as proof that God has abandoned you. It may be the very evidence that the Spirit is awakening you to the fact that **nothing on earth can satisfy a soul made for God.** The invitation of God has always been clear. In Isaiah 55:1, the Lord says, “*Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat!*” And at the close of Scripture, the invitation still stands. Revelation 22:17 says, “*Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life.*” From beginning to end, the voice of God is calling thirsty people to come. So come with your grief. Come with your questions. Come with your sin. Come with your emptiness. Come with your longing. Let your thirst become prayer. Let your thirst become surrender. Let your thirst become worship. Let your thirst become obedience. And if you need living water today, do not wait another moment—come to Jesus now.

Jesus lived thirsty, and he remained faithful. Jesus wept over Jerusalem because people did not know their King. Jesus trembled at Lazarus’s tomb because death was not the final design of God. Jesus cried, “I thirst,” from the cross because he entered fully into our suffering to redeem us. And even now, the risen Christ longs for the day when all his people will gather around his table in the fullness of the kingdom, where every tear will be wiped away and every thirst will finally be satisfied. Until that day, church, **let us live thirsty—but let us live thirsty for God.**

Let us pray. Lord Jesus, thank You that you were made like us in every way, yet without sin. Thank You that You understand our weakness, our grief, our temptation, and our longing. Teach us not to run from our thirst, but to bring it to You. Keep us from false comforts and empty substitutes. Turn our ache into prayer, our sorrow into trust, and our longing into deeper communion with You. And fix our hope on the day **when faith becomes sight** and **every thirsty heart is satisfied in Your presence.** In Jesus’ name, Amen.